

## **POLICY COMMITTEE | DRAFT MINUTES**

Meeting of the Policy Committee held on 19 October 2022 at 10.00 taking place via Zoom.

### **Present:**

Councillors David Francis (committee chair and Northumberland), Lillian Burns (committee vice chair and Cheshire), Peter Allison (Yorkshire), and Colin Peacock (Lancashire).

**Guests in attendance:** Cllr Kay Wesley (Congleton Town Council) and Cllr Sue Baxter (NALC vice-president) from the NALC National Network: Women Councillors.

**Staff present:** Justin Griggs (head of policy and communications), Chris Borg (policy manager), Fflur Jones (campaigns intern), Daisy Petrow (communications intern), Jessica Lancod-frost (policy officer, for part) and Rajiv Dudakia (digital communications manager, for part).

### **1. Apologies**

The committee chair welcomed all attendees to the meeting.

**Resolved:** That the apologies be noted from Cllrs Richard Page and Janet Wallace and Shelley Parker, policy and external affairs manager, SLCC.

### **2. Motions from county associations**

(a) Devon Association of Local Councils (DALC) on 30 miles per hour speed limits on single track rural roads.

Ian Cowling and Mark Clapham from DALC spoke to a motion asking NALC to lobby for a change in the law to create a maximum speed limit on rural single-track roads of 30 miles per hour (mph). There were dangerous problems being caused currently on single track Devon rural roads as many drivers exceeded that speed limit and caused danger and havoc to residents in the county.

During discussion, several points were raised:

- This issue is also a problem in Yorkshire.
- Additional signage was also discussed but was considered expensive.

- A DALC survey had revealed broad support for DALC and NALC lobbying for a reduction in the 30 (mph) speed limit on single track rural roads.
- CALC had engaged with Devon County Council on the issue who had reiterated the standing position.

**Resolved:** That the motion be noted and not supported at this stage, but that further work be undertaken including sourcing existing information on the number of incidents in Devon and engaging with the Local Government Association and Department for Transport to gauge their current positions on the imposition of 30 (mph) speed limits on rural roads.

(b) Avon Local Councils Association (ALCA) on exempting local councils from the latest round of government red diesel regulations

Cllr Chris Willmore from ALCA spoke to a motion seeking to exempt local councils from the updated red diesel regulations from April 2022. White diesel had previously been £1.47 per litre and red diesel £0.78 per litre so red diesel was and is convenient for local councils to use where possible in their machines. However, the new regulations have meant that local councils can now broadly no longer use red diesel in their machines when cutting grass unless it is for cutting verges on behalf of the principal council. This has caused much unfairness as it now means that local councils must use the much more expensive white diesel more often and for tax reasons the cost to local councils of cutting their grass has much increased.

**Resolved:** That the motion be supported and NALC lobbies central government to exempt local councils from the red diesel regulations.

### **3. Minutes previous meeting - 21 June 2022 and action log**

Cllr Burns raised the action log and asked for this to be updated to reflect previous discussions on the recommendations of the Smaller Councils Committee. The head of policy and communications reported committee action logs had been raised at the Larger Councils Committee and this was being explored to ensure consistency and simplicity.

**Resolved:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 21 June 2022 be noted.

### **4. Notes from the informal meeting - 22 August 2022**

The committee chair asked if there were any amendments to be made to the notes from the informal committee session on 22 August 2022. There were none.

**Resolved:** That the notes from the informal committee session on 22 August 2022 be noted.

## **5. Local government finance**

### **(a) Fair and secure funding campaign**

The policy manager provided a brief verbal update on the work of the Funding Task and Finish Group which was developing the evidence and business case for local councils to apply for directly to central government funds and agencies on the same basis as principal councils. He reported that the group had met twice since March, conducted a survey of local councils and was in the process of gathering data from central government departments and agencies to assess whether local councils can currently apply to those funds or not, and the overall value of those funds.

**Resolved:** That the verbal update be noted.

### **(b) NALC analysis of council tax levels of local precepting authorities 2022-23**

The policy officer provided a verbal update on the recently published NALC analysis of council tax levels of local precepting authorities 2022-23. The document was extremely useful annually in helping NALC vet the status of Band D and precept increases across the sector and was vital in helping NALC lobby for local council exclusion from council tax referendum principles.

NALC had been in touch with local councils with significant precept increases to understand the circumstances and reasons cited for such increases included staffing costs, energy bill costs, insurance costs and taking on assets and services.

A discussion also took place on the 10,221 civil parishes referred to in the Council Tax Statistics for Town and Parish Councils in England 2022-3 document and whether they included parish meetings. The policy officer informed the committee that the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLHUC) said it did, along with non-precepting local councils, local councils that “group” together to set a precept, and precepting parish councils.

**Resolved:** That the analysis be noted and that DLHUC be thanked for clarifying the statistical composition of smaller authorities in their Council Tax Statistics for Town and Parish Councils in England 2022-3 document.

A ten-minute break was held from 11.25 to 11.35.

## **6. We’re Right Here campaign for community power**

The policy manager provided a short verbal update on a recent NALC meeting with Will Brett an advisor from the We’re Right Here campaign. It had been agreed at the session that local councils could be official partners in community covenants under the Community Power Act, working with other local partners. Will and his colleague Inayat Omarji had also attended the July 2022 meeting of

the Super Councils Network where several councils expressed interest in getting involved including through a steering group.

**Resolved:** That the verbal update be noted.

## **7. British Parking Association 'Be Kind - Park with Others in Mind' campaign**

The head of policy and communications provided a short update on recent engagement with the British Parking Association and their request for NALC to support the 'Be Kind - Park with Others in Mind' campaign whose aim was to encourage residents to park unselfishly and sensibly in their places.

**Resolved:** That the committee support the 'Be Kind - Park with Others in Mind' campaign.

## **8. Sustainable Communities Act**

The policy manager provided a short verbal update on recent engagement with officials in the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities on the Sustainable Communities Act (SCA) and in particular the need for future ministerial decisions on proposals to be made within statutory timescales. He added that he was working with county officers on a review of material on the NALC website on SCA.

Regarding the Weymouth Town Council proposal on dependant carer's allowances submitted three years ago, the committee noted with concern that a minister from the previous administration had confirmed in response to a written question from NALC's president that there would be a decision in due course. While government officials had agreed to pursue this at DLUHC, it was agreed NALC would continue to lobby for a ministerial response and gather examples of how this issue is affecting local councils.

**Resolved:** That the update on SCA and the Weymouth Town Council proposal be noted, and NALC continue to lobby the government and gather more information to support this.

## **9. Better banking campaign**

The policy manager and head of policy and communications provided a short verbal update on the campaign for better banking services for local councils and a recent meeting with Action for Communities in Rural England (ACRE). It was reported that ACRE were also working with National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) on this issue which also affected voluntary and community organisations and charities. Based on a short report produced by NCVO summarising evidence from its own banks survey, UK Finance had commissioned

some work into an impact assessment of poor banking services across the public sector.

**Resolved:** That the verbal update be noted.

## **10. Levelling Up White Paper and Bill**

The head of policy and communications provided a short verbal update on the levelling up white paper and the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill. The bill was still progressing through parliament and was at the committee stage where NALC was continuing to press for changes regarding remote meetings and standards. He added there had been no progress on the white paper commitment to conduct a neighbourhood governance review and this was an issue NALC raised directly with the local government minister at the Conservative Party conference.

**Resolved:** That the verbal update be noted.

## **11. White Ribbon campaign**

The committee received a presentation from Cllr Kay Wesley of Congleton Town Council and the NALC National Network: Women Councillors on the White Ribbon Campaign whose aim was to raise awareness of domestic violence towards women, and to reduce it.

**Resolved (1):** That NALC support the White Ribbon campaign and encourage local councils to support the campaign.

**Resolved (2):** That the Management Board consider supporting the campaign by NALC becoming a White Ribbon accredited organisation.

## **12. Responses to consultations**

The policy manager confirmed that responses had been submitted to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport inquiry into short term holiday lets and the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs consultation on the English portion of Dormant Assets Funding. It was agreed that no updates to the policy register were required.

**Resolved:** That the consultation responses be noted.

## **13. Rural Services Network representation and conference**

Cllr Burns confirmed she wished to stand down as NALC's representative to the Rural Services Network. It was agreed to ask Policy Committee members first, then if no interest, to the Smaller Councils Committee. It was suggested that Cllr Burns write a short outline of the role to help councillors understand what is required.

Cllr Burns was thanked for her very thorough written report of the RSN conference she attended.

**Resolved:** That Cllr Burns be asked to draft a short role description which can then be sent to Policy Committee and as needed, Smaller Councils Committee, to secure the relevant expression of interest.

#### **14. Date and time of next meeting**

To note the next meeting of the Policy Committee will be held at on Tuesday 24 January 2023 (to be confirmed) at 10.00 via Zoom.

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